

# **Practical Tips on Engaging with the Media**

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# **Practical Tips On Engaging With The Media**

***By Kathryn Dolan, Indiana Supreme Court Public Information Officer***

***September 2009***

## **HOW TO RESPOND TO A MEDIA INQUIRY**

### What To Say About An Ongoing Case

You are welcome to attend the court proceedings scheduled in this matter that are open to the public. You may also find it helpful to review the court documents associated with this case. You can contact the Clerk (or the court) who maintains the record. Please be aware there may be a charge to obtain copies of court documents. You may find it helpful to review the chronological case summary, which is the docket. It may include information about upcoming hearings which may be open to the public. You can get that information at X.

The Indiana Code of Judicial Conduct prevents me from commenting on ongoing cases. The Code also requires that I prohibit video and still photography during court sessions.

Thank you for your interest in covering the courts. Helpful information for reporters can be found at [courts.in.gov/media](http://courts.in.gov/media) and our county website.

### What To Say About Other Court Business

If documents that are a matter of public record are requested, provide them to the media. Also, consider what other documents "they might want to see." These are the documents that you *want* to show them. These are the documents that tell *your* story.

If possible, offer to meet in person to explain what the documents mean.

Start planning how you will advocate your position, including writing down that position.

Be ready to be asked to do an interview. This does *not* mean do an interview. It means be ready to say yes, no, or here are my conditions.

### How To Act In An Interview

Don't fight the obvious; disarm the controversy by answering directly.

Answer the same whether the camera is on or off or the reporter is taking notes or just listening.

Reiterate your same points, over and over and over and over and over and over and over again!!!

Practice aloud saying, "I don't know the answer to your question," and "Can you please repeat the question, I don't understand what you mean?"

Fix any misstatements at the end of the interview.

### Reacting To What Will Appear On TV Or In Print

Be realistic.

Correct errors.

Be prepared for additional fall-out such as citizen calls, other news agencies inquiries, and online comments.

## **PERSONAL SITUATIONS THAT BECOME PUBLIC**

### Releasing A Public Statement

"I made a very poor decision that I regret. I cannot take back my actions, but can and will accept the consequences. Please direct future questions to my attorney."

"This is a difficult time for my family. My husband and I are getting a divorce. We do not anticipate answering further questions about this private matter. Thank you."

"Any questions about my brother's action should be directed to him or the county prosecutor. From a legal perspective, I cannot comment on this matter except to say I have full faith in the justice system. We are like any family; there are challenges to overcome and difficult situations to face. Thank you for understanding why I cannot discuss this private matter."

"We were very disappointed to learn of our daughter's arrest for underage drinking. Like many parents, we simply want the best for our child and will continue to encourage our teenager to make better choices. We have faith in the justice system and will not be answering future questions about this matter. Please contact our attorney. We would like to use this challenging family situation to encourage parents to talk to their children about the ill effects of underage drinking."

## **HOW TO DIRECT THE MEDIA TO COVER THE COURTS**

Provide them with story ideas on issues you want them to cover.

Be open to teaching some basic information.

Provide them with a one page fact sheet on your court.

Develop a policy for obtaining court records/evidence/audio recordings.

Draft a Decorum Order for high profile cases.

Have a policy for twitter, facebook and other new media as it relates to court business.

Consider writing a "my view" type column in the local newspaper or speaking at a local civic club.